

Documents on Diplomacy: The Source

The French Revolution Begins Gouverneur Morris to John Jay, July 1, 1789

My Dear Sir:
I am too much occupied to find time for the use of a cipher, and in effect the Government here is so much occupied with its own affairs, that in transmitting to you a letter under an envelope there is no risk. This, however, I am pretty certain will go safe. The States General have now been a long time in session, and have done nothing. . . . The nobles deeply feel their situation. The King [*Louis XVI*], after siding with them, was frightened into an abandonment of them. He acts from terror only.

The soldiery in this city, particularly the French guards, declare they will not act against the people. They . . . now . . . parade about the streets drunk. . . . Some of them have in consequence been confined, not by the force, but by the adroitness of authority. Last night this circumstance became known, and immediately a mob repaired to the prison. The soldiers on guard unfixed their bayonets and joined the assailants. A party of dragoons ordered on duty to disperse the rioters, thought it better to drink with them, and return back to their quarters. The soldiers, with others confined in the same prison, were then paraded in triumph to the Palais Royal, which is now the liberty pole of this city and there they celebrated, as usual, their joy. Probably this evening some other prisons will be opened: for *liberté* is now the general cry, and authority is a name, not a real existence. . . . In effect, the sword has slipped out of the Monarch's hands, without his perceiving a tittle of the matter.

All these things in a nation, not yet fitted by education and habit for the enjoyment of freedom, give me frequently suspicions, that they will greatly overshoot their mark, if indeed they have not

already done it. Already some people talk of limiting the King's negative upon the laws. And as they have hitherto felt severely the authority exercised in the name of their princes, every limitation of that authority seems to them desirable. Never having felt the evils of too weak an Executive, the disorders to be apprehended from anarchy make as yet no impression.

. . . My opinion is, that the king, to get fairly out of the scrape in which he finds himself, would subscribe to any thing. And truly from him, little is to be expected in any way. The Queen [*Marie Antoinette*], hated, humbled, mortified, feels, and feigns, and intrigues, to save some shattered remnants of the royal authority; but to know that she favors a measure is the certain means to frustrate its success.

. . . The best chance which royalty has, is, that popular excesses may alarm. At the rate at which things are now going, the King of France must soon be one of the most limited monarchs in Europe.

I am, &c.

GOUVERNEUR MORRIS

Source

"Emperor Dead" and other Historic American Dispatches, Edited by Peter D. Eicher, pp. 43-44; Washington, D.C.: 1997